# Termination Letter

MADE IN YANA

# Dear corporate worker/employee,

**If you are reading this, it means that in less than a week, I will no longer be employed by [this company], and that by distributing this zine, I made sure my departure is final.**

Don’t be afraid to share this text with others.
In fact, I encourage it. I feel no shame about any of the details disclosed, and I value transparency far above the comfort of privacy. Your peers could be going through the same thing and you wouldn’t even know it. We can’t keep being afraid to ask.

My name is Yana - you may know me as the [Researcher] who joined the team in the [redacted time frame] after transferring from the [redacted] department where I was for [a redacted amount of time].
I was born and raised in Russia but have lived here in the US for the past ten years.

If we have met, amazing!
I hope you are doing well,
and I hope to catch up with you at this [event].

If we have not met or interacted much yet, then I wish we had, and I hope we get the opportunity to do that.

If you've been here for a while,
you may have seen people randomly let go
(for example, [at this redacted instance]), and
no one really knowing why, what happened,
and what it meant.

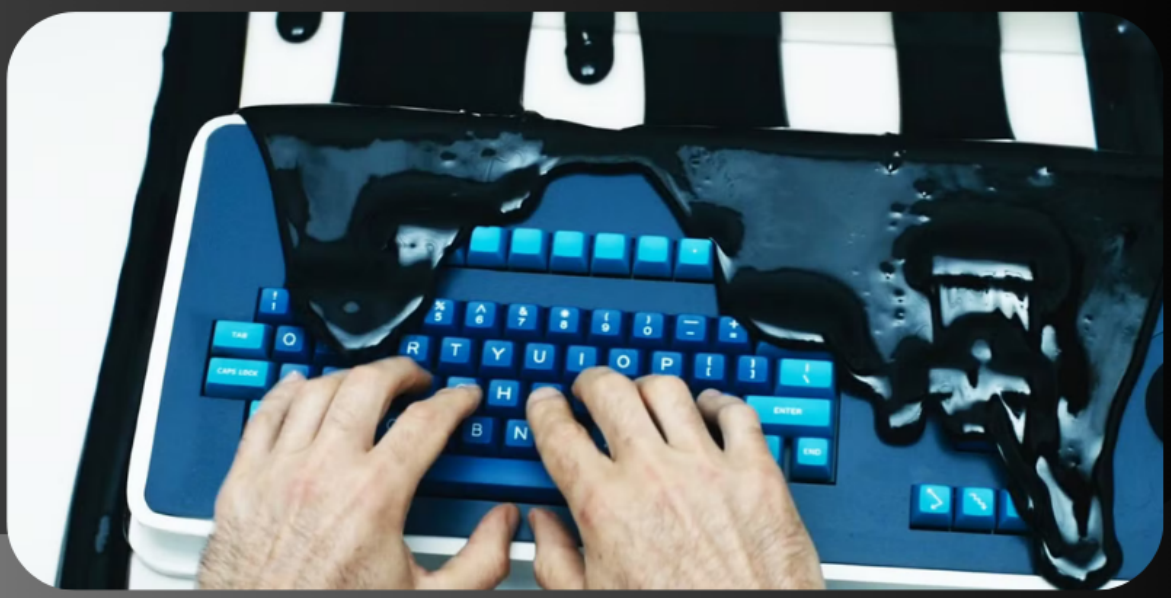
**When I joined, I still remember
the whispers and rumors, and the
uncertainty everyone felt - and yet,
the deafening silence and the leadership's
words of affirmation that all is good.**

I remember thinking "huh, I wonder what's
up with that" and never asking any
questions or thinking more.

But now,

**I don’t want what happened to me to be reduced to a rumor.**

I want you to know **exactly** what has been going on, exactly why I am being let go, in the detailed and uncomfortable context this decision resides - and for you to make your own conclusions on what this means.



**In the [redacted time frame], I began conversations with my management team and the Human Resources team regarding the company's support for international employees.**

**I brought up the fact that the current system for supporting international employees is failing us.**

As international employees, we find out the hard way that employers 'sponsoring' your work visa is really a myth.
In reality, we are enrolled into a H1B work visa ***lottery***, in which we have a 90% chance of losing.

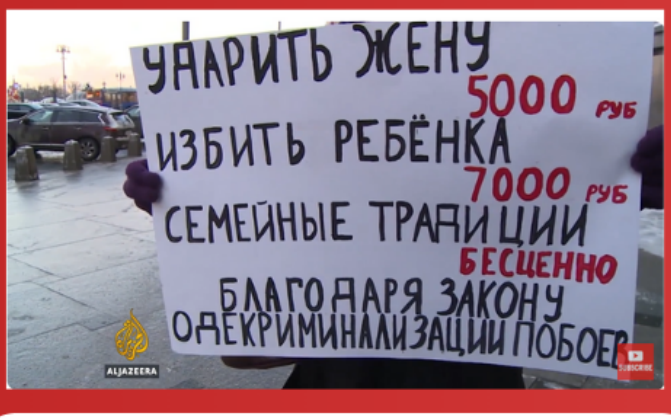
We have at most **3 years** to win the lottery, which inevitably we don't. Meanwhile, [company] policies (not laws) state that the company will only apply for someone's Green Card after the employee has worked here for **5 years**.

Despite the company advertising themselves as international-worker-friendly and as a reliable place that helps its people, if you do the math, **there is no realistic way** for international employees to be supported and to stay working and living here.

For some it's okay,
they can go back home
and be relatively fine.

**But for others,**
**it is crushing.**

**As a victim of domestic abuse,
raised in a place where domestic violence
was legalized when I was a child,
I cannot go back to Russia.**

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THANKS TO LAWS ON
DOMESTIC ABUSE DECRIMINALIZATION

If I do, I will have:

- no way to access my money (bank operations with Russia were cut off in 2022)
- no way to access key documents and IDs (currently in my abuser's possession)
- therefore no way to perform legal and financial operations (get a debit card, get a job, a lease, health insurance)
- no concept of 'restraining order' to protect me physically

I cannot just sit by waiting for this fate to get to me.
And if someone has the power to help,
I **will** ask for it and **will** advocate for it.

So, I asked my company for help.
I explained my situation and asked:

**Can we PLEASE file for my green card earlier? I have been here for two and a half years, I have lost every lottery, I have tried everything, and this would be life-changing.**

The corporate lawyers said:

**Hmmm... This is a very unusual circumstance, really an exceptional situation. But! If you find a way to stay here for a few more years while your green card application is processing, then we will support your application.**

**We support you.**

**I looked high and low, and I did not qualify for any way to stay here:**

not another student visa (which requires me to go back to school, for which I have no money, and for which I do not qualify for financial aid due to being international)

not a celebrity visa (which requires you to be nationally recognized, and win a prize or be in 3+ exhibitions)

not marriage (the visa for which requires your partner to make enough money to fully financially sustain you, so make over $100,000 a year)

not any other way

**At some point while talking to the company lawyer I joked:**

**Damn, I should be a refugee at this point!**

**And the lawyer said:**

**Actually....**
**Given your circumstances,**
**you may want to look into asylum.**

And they were right - under a certain condition, I do qualify to be an asylum seeker, which would allow me to stay and work in the US while my application is processing (about 8 years).

The case would not be easy.
Asylum application procedures require you to:

- Recall and describe every detail of years of abuse in a written testimony
- Collect witness statements (which sometimes requires hard conversations with people who watched yet didn't intervene)
- Collect evidence of danger, for example in form of written threats made to you
- Undergo a confrontational interrogation by a court judge poking holes in your story
- Pay approximately $15,000 and live under the threat of deportation for 8 years, with your relationships and identity hanging by a thread

The process is deeply re-traumatizing, knocking you down to your knees every time you work on your case. I re-lived every minute of it over and over again, just to show up for work every morning, for months. But, it's one way to stay here for a few more years, right? **Maybe in that time, the company will file for my green card, right?**

Now that I had this info, I came back to the lawyers, and they say:

Great, let's start the process then!
We will refer you to Human Resources.

When HR Person #1 contacts me however, they start prolonging the process, telling me things like:

We just need to check this one thing with the leadership...

and

Maybe we'll need to file in the winter instead of right now...

and putting more and more pressure on me by saying:

This is just such an *exceptional* circumstance...

which really just sounds like a memo:

Show us you're *exceptional* enough for us to go through with this.

My manager gives me advice on how to ‘prove myself’ and ‘increase my chances’.

After spending weeks working at least 10 hours a day trying to produce “*exceptional*” reports with 30+ prospects, I crack under pressure on 2 or 3 reports.

And the Human Resources team finally gets back to me and says:

**The company has decided not to file for your application.**

When I get confused, I ask:

You mean... not file now,
and instead file in winter?...

**No, not to file at all.**

We will continue this conversation **at a later time**.

HR Person #1 and I never spoke again.
She left the company the next day.

I tried telling the HR Person #2 assigned to my case that this is **not okay**.

I told them that you can't just **dangle** something like this in front of an employee (something that has to do with their *basic safety for the rest of their life*), **bait** them, give them advice on how to "increase their chances" and really show that they're "worth it", **and then just drop them.**

I told them that all these months of pain could have been avoided, I asked them to **please never do this again, because I never want anyone else to go through what I went through.**

In response, HR Person #2 said that I misunderstood, that the company never intended to make me over-work, that it is something I made up and that I was the one who put that pressure on myself.

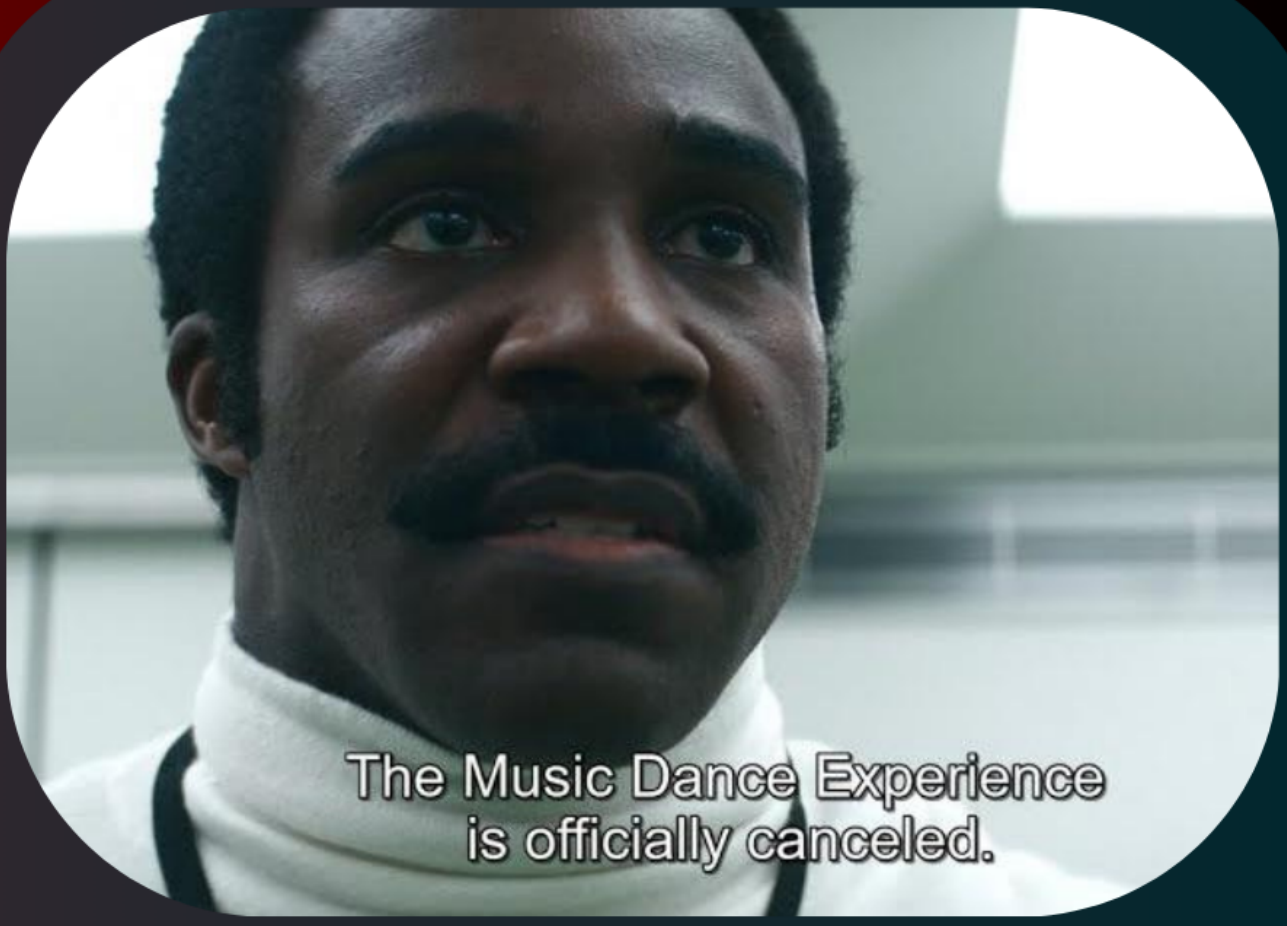
**Then she said to keep up hope, because otherwise my productivity will go down.**

I pushed back and told her that the HR department and the company need to educate themselves on the immigration system, the immigrant experience in the US, the **immense power imbalances** that come with an immigrant-employer dynamic,

and to teach the management teams what not to say and **how not to encourage self-sacrificing self-abusive work behaviors** (aka trying to “prove yourself”).

In response, she got even more defensive and told me that I am ***“intentionally misunderstanding”*** them and that I am being ***“uncooperative”***.

She said that it is ***“frustrating”* to hear my feedback**, and never spoke to me again.




I was crushed. I tried to move on, I tried to forget everything that happened, I got my performance back up and delivered some of my best reports.

**To the credit of [the middle manager]**, she did respond to my request for skip-level check-ins, and she **did acknowledge** that the way this situation was handled was messed up.

But the cycle was not over.

Did you know that when refugees and asylum seekers ask for permission to stay in this country, the US government prohibits them from working for six months after their application?

People come here from all over the world, fleeing from all kinds of horrors, with no money and no resources - and are considered criminals for providing for their families.

I have been in the US for ten years - I was sent here at the age of 14, went to school and university here, so I am in a much better position, but I did spend the past ten years trying to escape abuse and financial manipulation by the same person who sent me here.

These ten years conclude in [this redacted time frame], when my student visa, and every possible extension of it, runs out.

So, [6 months prior], the moment I applied for asylum and found out about the 180-day asylum clock, I told my company right away - hey, I will have (in my case) three months when I am not allowed to work.

I explained the asylum clock to my manager and the HR team in the same way as I did to you - honestly, as the messed up rule it is, **out of my control**, **that will empty me of my savings and leave me with no income or health insurance for months.**

I told them this in advance, because I wanted to give enough time for the company to prepare and plan, and because **once those months are over, I really needed a job to come back to, badly.**

Back then, HR Person #1 said to me:

Oh yes, **don't even worry**.
**You will be re-hired no problem**.
This is a **standard procedure**,
it happens regularly when international workers need to renew their visas, and the HR team knows **exactly** what to do.

**Come February, I re-approach the Human Resources team and tell them hey,
I heard this was a standard procedure, let me know what you need from me, so that we can start the process.**

**Suddenly, it is once again taking an oddly long time.**

When I ask my manager how the meetings about my re-hiring going, he says that they keep having meetings upon meetings in which **no one knows what they are doing**, that they keep going in circles and saying the same things without really saying anything.

**Then he says:**

*IF* we hire you back...

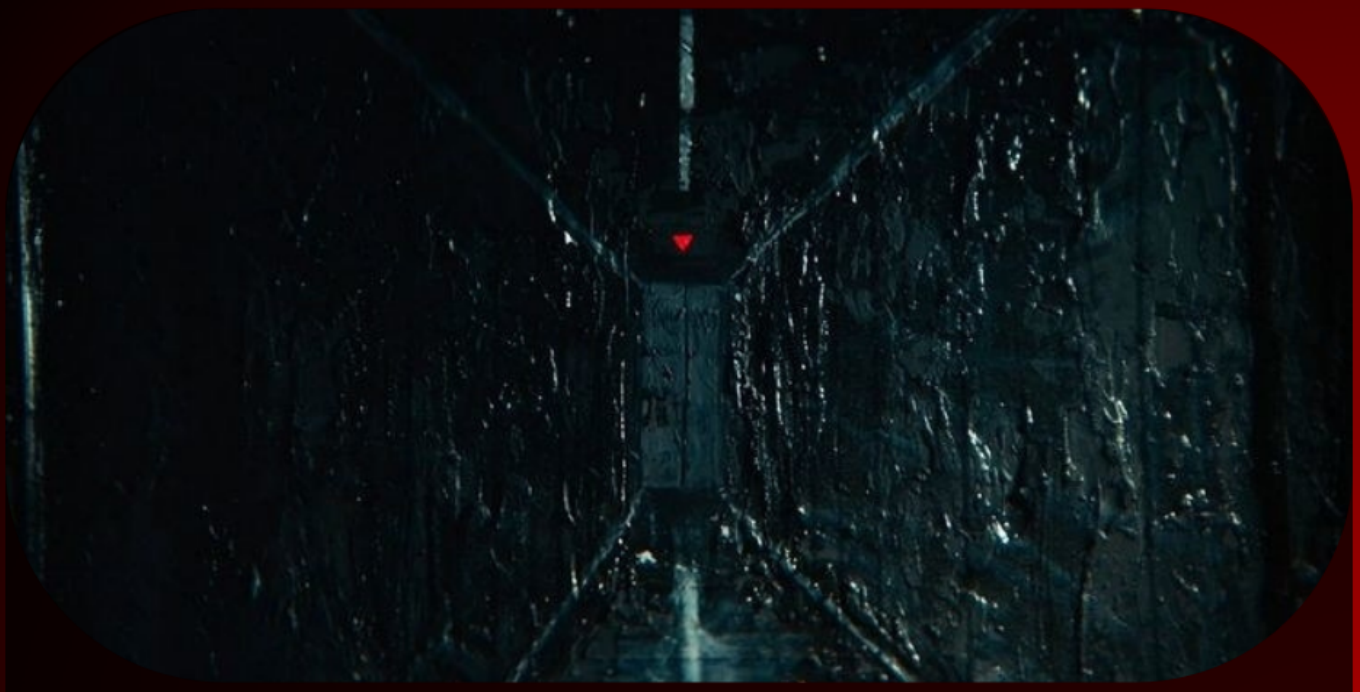
**and I go:**

**Wait, what?**
**What do you mean "*IF*" you hire me back? How much is NOT hiring me back on the table???**

**to which he responds:**

Uuummmmm, I don't know,
I don't know anything,
I really don't know, you need to speak to [my boss] and the department manager about it, because I really don't know.

**Something felt REALLY off.**



**That Friday, I was invited to meeting with my manager's boss, the department manager, and a (yet another) HR person #3. I tell them that all I need is an offer letter.**

I know that I will have my work authorization card in hand by July 1st.

The last time I got my offer letter from this company I was still waiting for my work authorization, just like I would be in these months.

There is no requirement for me to already have my work authorization when I get an offer letter -
by law, I only need it in the first week of me restarting the position.

All I need is just **one offer letter**, to know that at the end of those three months, I will still have a job to come back to. To know that once my savings are depleted, I will once again have health insurance to go to the doctor and a therapist.

**That's when they tell me:**

**We are unable to give you that.**

They refused.

## The reasons why kept switching.

**First it was:**

**We can't possibly know when you will get your work authorization.**

**I said:**

**Yes you can, you do. I told you - July 1st.**
A work authorization is not something you apply for, it is something you *get*. You show up at an office, they ask you "What is the capital of America?", you are confused for a second but answer their question, and you get your EAD card in the mail 30 days later.

**Then it was:**

**We just don't know what our personnel needs will be in July.**

**What do you mean you don't know?**

If this three-month break didn't have to be a thing, I would still have my position in July.
Do you preemptively fire all employees at your company this year, because you're not 'sure' what your personnel needs will be like next year? You know, just in case?

***What do you mean you don't know?***

You keep telling us in our department meetings that business is going as usual even under the new administration, that we may get **even more business** because the landscape is changing and clients will want updated information on all their projects.

If it's business as usual or even more business, you have contractors who already fill in when we are chronically under-staffed for half the year. You would have plenty of money to pay them out of the money and benefits you won't be paying me.
**Is it really business as usual, or are you not telling us something?**

I asked them:

What if I was going on disability?
What if I was taking parental leave?
What if I lost a loved one and needed to grieve?
What if I got into a car accident and needed to be hospitalized for those three months?
**What if it was literally anyone else in this company, who is in a vulnerable position, and needed support?** What would you do?

**The reasons kept changing, my questions deflected, suggestions discounted.**

Eventually I ask:

Am I... getting fired?
Is that what is going on?
Because if I don't have an offer,
that means I don't have a job.

The department manager looks up to think and says:

It's not... EXACTLY like being fired...

At the end of that meeting, I said that **this is NOT treating people as people**. I said that this is something I want to bring up again. So, I am bringing it up.

The next meeting, they said that they want to show me their "***investment***" in me - by letting me take PTO as an *exception* to the company policy that doesn't let you take days off within 2 weeks of leaving the job.

**Why is that a policy anyway?**
How is it okay not to let people take sick days or mental health days anytime before leaving? I worked three years for this PTO and they wouldn't even pay it off - so how is this a favor?

They said they want to show their "***investment***" in me by enrolling me in one last round of the work visa lottery, **which they are supposed to do for international workers anyway.**

Were they going to bail on that too?

They said they want to show their "***investment***" in me by allowing me to come to this conference.

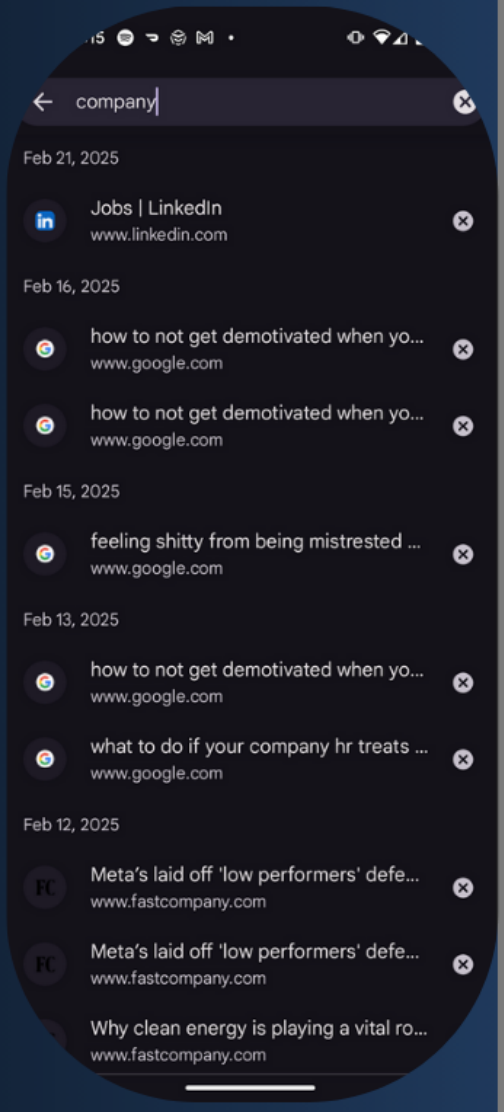
**Was I not supposed to?**

**They said:**

**We really want to make sure we leave this meeting without anyone feeling like anything is unfair.**

They gave me **four minutes** to go on a tirade on how they mistreat their international employees, how they could be doing so much more.
Then they left the meeting.

I kept googling
“why do I feel so horrible after my company treating me bad",
“what to do when hr gaslights you",
“how to not get demotivated when your company treats you poorly”




In one of my searches, I saw someone comment “the workplace is probably the most likely place for some survivors to re-traumatize themselves”, and I got flashbacks.

To the same tactics used to make me think that bruises, ripped out hair, scratch marks all over my body, and bite marks are acceptable.

To the thoughts that no one will care and no one will do anything, because it’s “normal”.
To the thoughts that **maybe I deserve this.**

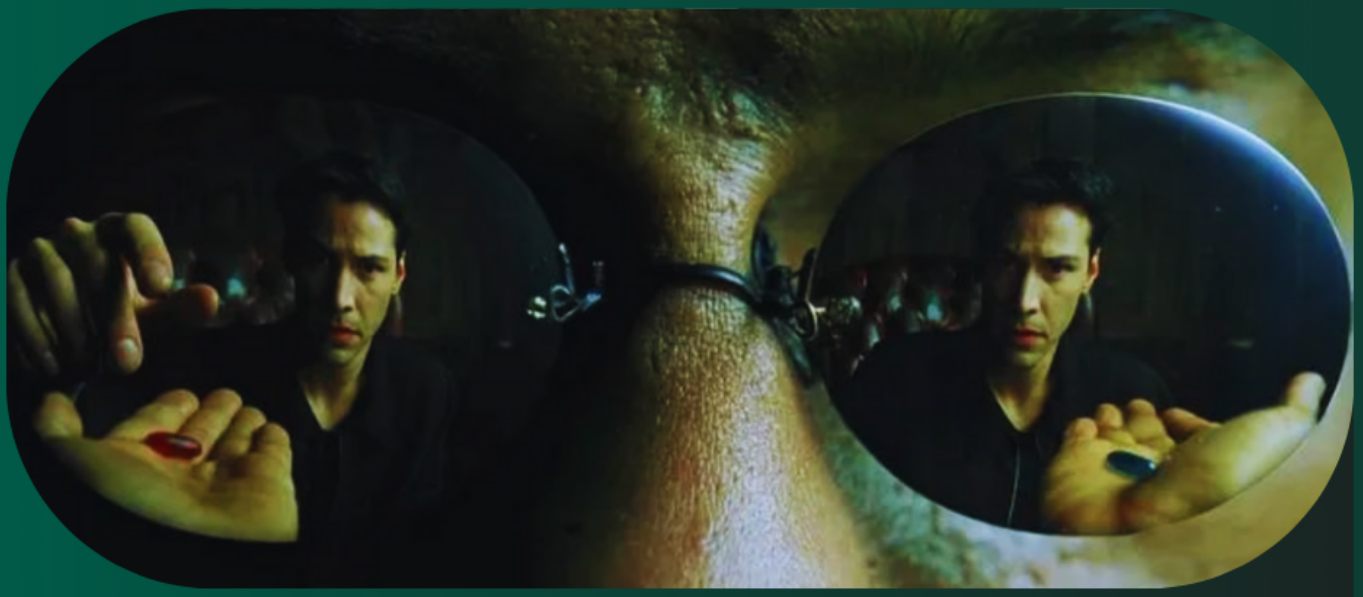
It took me **16 hours** to write my self-evaluation because I felt so worthless, so disposable, so weak, so insignificant.

If they don't even want to invest into basic things, into my basic safety, **why does it matter how well I do in projects? What good do I have to say about myself?**

A colleague said:

> **You know, I think that the way the company has treated you this year is what may be making it so hard to write this evaluation.**

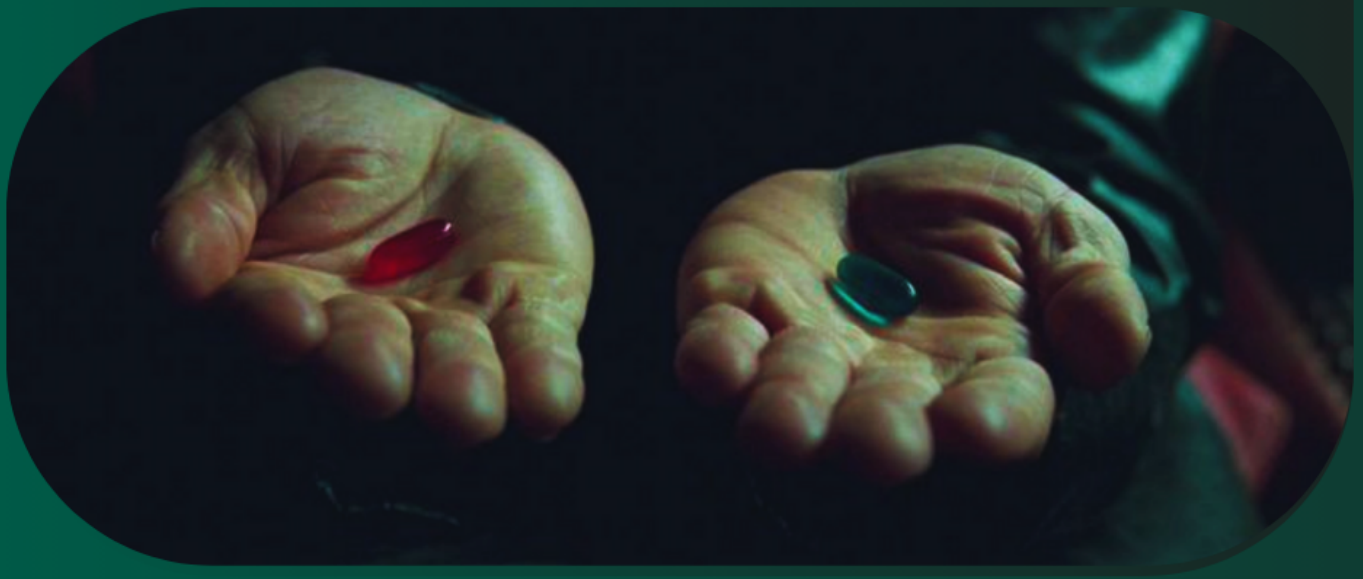
I cried, because it was the first time someone recognized how messed up all of this was.

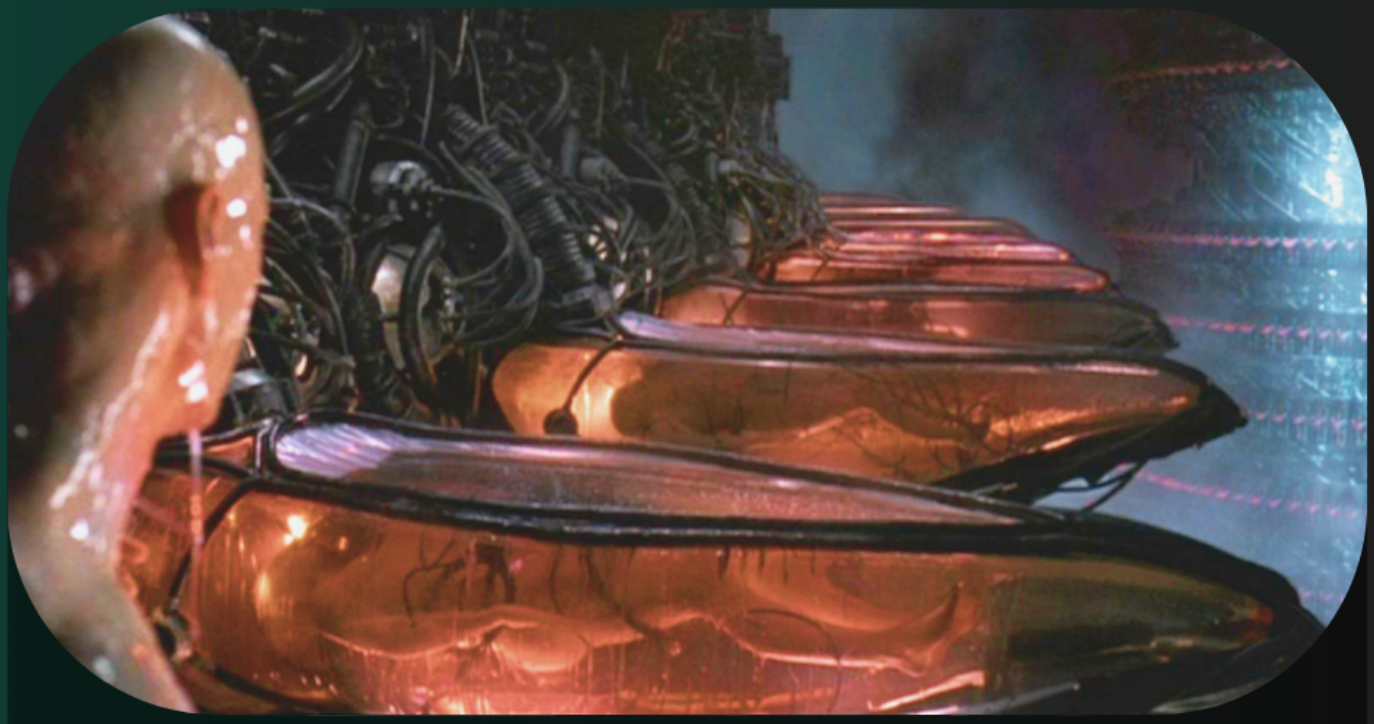


I really wanted to like this place.
If they supported me,
I would have worked for them for 20 years.

**I would have been [company]-pilled,**
or, as less cynical people call it, a ***"loyal employee"***,
just like I was until this happened.

I recommended this company to all my friends,
and several of them work here now.
What did I get them into?
How will they be treated?





When I think about it though, I don't think this is personal. The people who made this decision probably don’t even know my name.
**I think this is structural, systemic.**
**Are there others who have gone through the same thing? Will there be more?**
**Am I just the first one on the chopping block?**

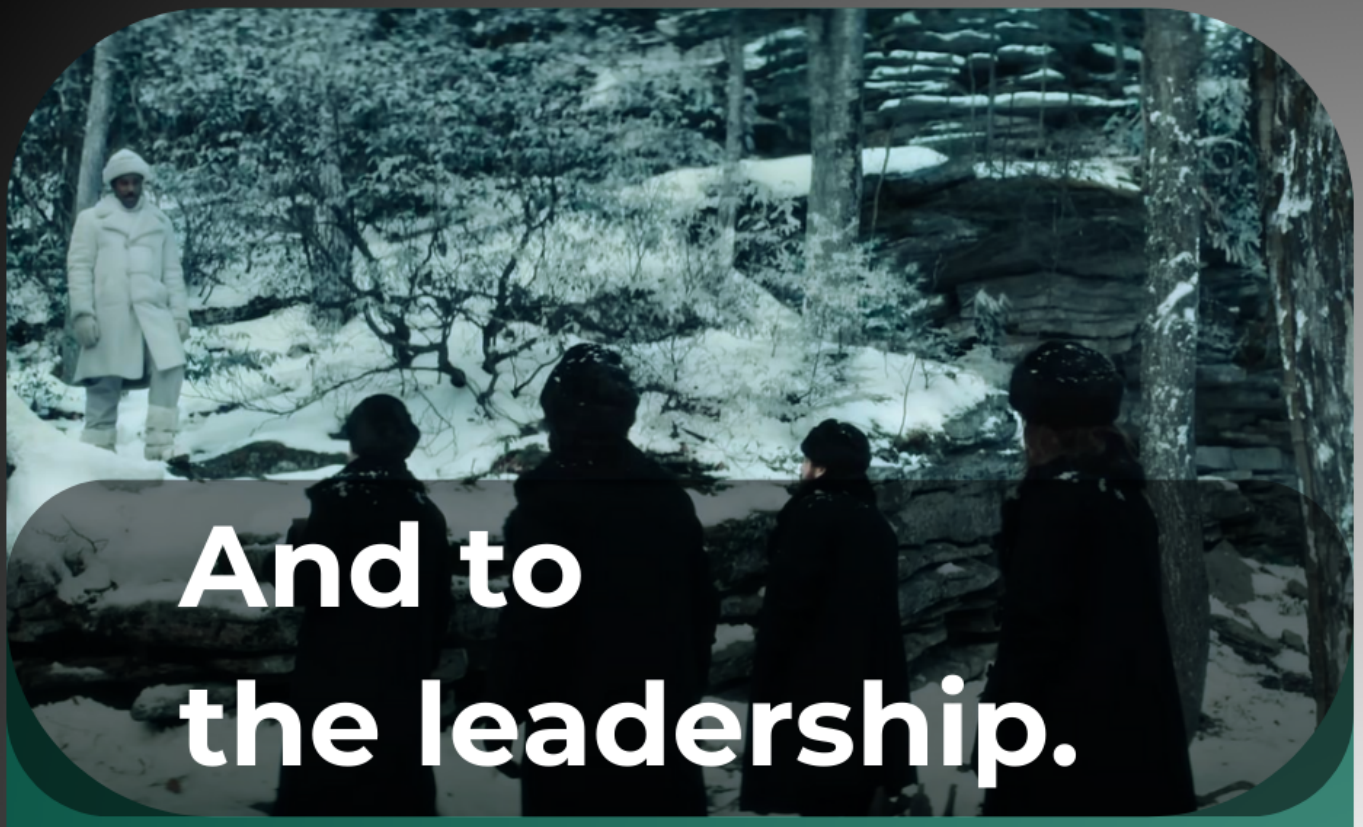
**To anyone still here, I am worried about you.**
If you feel like something is off, I hope you ask questions, confront the leadership.
Do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself, but don't neglect yourself. If you have been mistreated, tell others. **Don't let people treat you as disposable - because you are not.**
You deserve better than this.

**If you think you are about to be quiet-fired over profit margins, or see others in the same situation - I'd love to chat.**

Let me know how you are doing, and if you need any help. When I was trying to handle this situation, there was no guidance and no playbook that could advise me to any capacity. The people I've told about this offered sympathy, which I appreciate, but I think we need to have more resources on how to stand up for ourselves with dignity when we are mistreated in these legal but dehumanizing ways.

Just because it is legal does not mean it is okay, and does not mean that we can't say anything.

Just because it is "unprofessional" to tell the truth does not mean that you ought to stay silent.



# And to the leadership.

I don’t know who made this decision, I don’t know who contributed to it, I can’t know who cares but stayed silent and who genuinely does not care. Only each person individually knows what they could have done, what they did and did not do. All I can see is the decision, or a string of decisions that caused damage far more than you understand.

To be clear, it is wrong to quiet-fire people.
It is wrong to bait your employees into a system designed to ultimately fail them.
It is wrong to gaslight and blame them for it.
It is wrong not to take responsibility.

**The way I take responsibility for distributing this zine is by accepting that those people may never want to speak to me again.**

There is a part of me that really wishes I could just put away this pain and continue to have a good relationship with them, to speak to them on equal ground instead of like 'employers' and 'employees'. But this is NOT a personal dispute, this is a dispute between me as the employee (a person) and the 'leadership' (a group of people, named and unnamed, going from middle managers up to the elusive C-suite executives and stakeholders).
Each of you individually wouldn't usually have financial, healthcare, and legal power over me. However, **each of you as a 'boss', and all of you as a group, you make up "the employer"** - an entity that came together with the ultimate, commonly-agreed goal of making money, with the value of profit over people in mind. I am speaking to that entity. You, all together, have the power to either save my livelihood, or throw it away. And you threw it away. It's always the good old saying, isn't it? With great power comes great responsibility. And since this responsibility was not taken, the LEAST I can do is speak up.
This is not a matter of vengeance, this is a matter of my duty to myself and others.

I can’t know for sure how much retaliation I will get for doing this, but I’m not expecting smooth sailing.

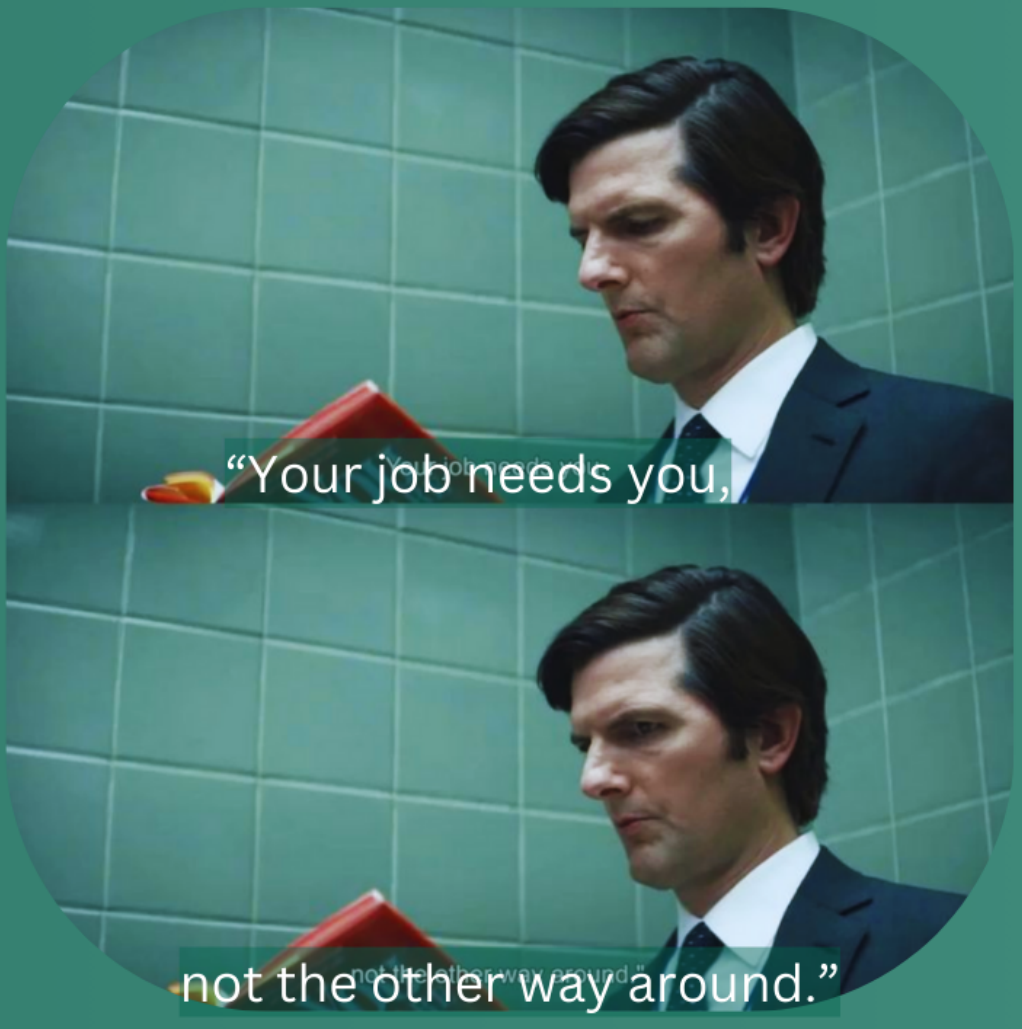
If the reaction is bad, then I can see why, but at the end of the day I will ask myself - do I need the respect of someone who doesn't respect those speaking up and standing up for their needs and values?

Would I REALLY want to be around someone who looks down on people for having a moral compass and strong principles?

If this is the environment, the culture in this company, I don’t think I’m a good fit.
I don’t think I would last,
and I don’t think the company itself would last.

Meeting people's needs lasts.
Human empathy lasts.
Open communication and
honesty last.

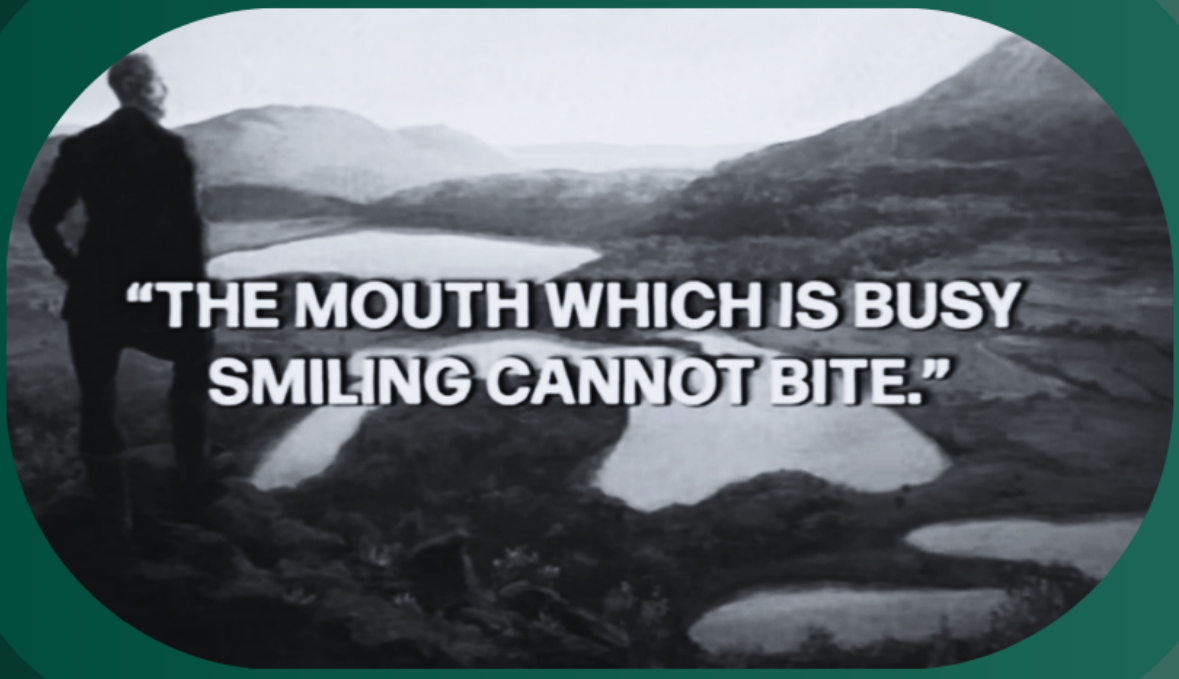
**Taking action lasts.**




I can only hope that my message
to this reader lasts.

When this happens, people tell you to forget it. To swallow it and move on.

Writing this down and putting this on a piece of paper is one of the dumbest things you could ever do.



**But that’s the point.**
**The permanence of this record.**

Do you really want me to forget
what happened?
Do you want me to sever myself so that
this company can do whatever they
want to me, and I don't even remember?

You don’t deserve this.

I don't deserve this.

Immigrants don't deserve this.

Americans don't deserve this.

# No one deserves this.

**And I never want you to forget that.**

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence.
And there are so many silences to be broken.

- Audre Lorde,
The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

*”Walk into the forest.*

*Your workspace will be cleared and any personal items discarded.*

*Your file, including any and all professional interactions and personal relations, will be purged and destroyed.*

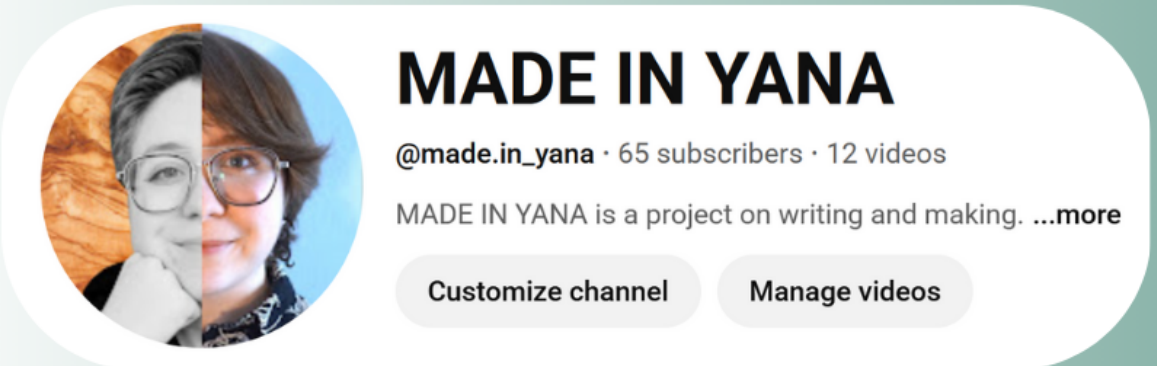
*It will be as if you never even existed nor drew a single breath upon this Earth.*

*May Kier’s mercy follow you into the eternal dark. ... Now.”*

**Goodbye, everybody.**

**Remember,**
**hang in there.**

YouTube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